NUMB. CCCCXCIV.

The SPECTATOR.

Ægritudinem laudare, unam rem maximè deteſtabilem, quorum eſt tandem Philoſophorum? Cic.

Friday, September 26. 1712.

ABOUT an Age ago it was the Faſhion in *England*, for every one that would be thought religious, to throw as much Sanctity as poſſible into his Face, and in particular to abſtain from all Appearances of Mirth and Pleaſantry, which were looked upon as the Marks of a Carnal Mind. The Saint was of a ſorrowful Countenance, and generally eaten up with Spleen and Melancholly. A Gentleman, who was lately a great Ornament to the Learned World, has diverted me more than once with an Account of the Reception which he met with from a very famous Independent Miniſter, who was Head of a Colledge in thoſe times. This Gentleman was then a young Adventurer in the Republic of Letters, and juſt fitted out for the Univerſity with a good Cargo of *Latin* and *Greek*. His Friends were reſolved that he ſhould try his Fortune at an Election which was drawing near in the College, of which the Independent Miniſter, whom I have before mentioned, was Governor. The Youth, according to Cuſtom, waited on him in order to be examined. He was received at the Door by a Servant, who was one of that gloomy Generation which were then in Faſhion. He conducted him, with great Silence and Seriouſneſs, to a long Gallery which was darkned at Noonday, and had only a ſingle Candle burning in it. After a ſhort Stay in this melancholly Apartment, he was led into a Chamber hung with Black, where he entertained himſelf for ſome time by the glimmering of a Taper, till at length the Head of the Colledge came out to him, from an inner Room, with half a Dozen Night-Caps upon his Head, and a religious Horror in his Countenance. The young Man trembled; but his Fears encreaſed, when, inſtead of being aſked what Progreſs he had made in Learning, he was examined how he abounded in Grace. His *Latin* and *Greek* ſtood him in little ſtead; he was to give an Account only of the State of his Soul, whether he was of the Number of the Elect; what was the Occaſion of his Converſion; upon what Day of the Month, and Hour of the Day it happened; how it was carried on, and when compleated? The whole Examination was ſummed up with one ſhort Queſtion, Namely, *Whether he was prepared for Death*? The Boy, who had been bred up by honeſt Parents, was frighted out of his Wits at the Solemnity of the Proceeding, and by the laſt dreadful Interrogatory; ſo that upon making his Eſcape out of this Houſe of Mourning, he could never be brought a Second time to the Examination, as not being able to go through the Terrors of it.

Notwithſtanding this general Form and Outſide of Religion is pretty well worn out among us, there are many Perſons, who, by a natural Unchearfulneſs of Heart, miſtaken Notions of Piety, or Weakneſs of Underſtanding, love to indulge this uncomfortable way of Life, and give up themſelves a Prey to Grief and Melancholly. Superſtitious Fears, and groundleſs Scruples, cut them off from the Pleaſures of Converſation, and all thoſe Social Entertainments which are not only innocent but laudable; as if Mirth was made for Reprobates, and Chearfulneſs of Heart denied thoſe who are the only Perſons that have a proper Title to it.

Some-

(Price Two-pence.)

Sombrius is one of these Sons of Sorrow. He thinks himself obliged in Duty to be sad and disconsolate. He looks on a sudden Fit of Laughter, as a Breach of his Baptismal Vow. An innocent Jest startles him like Blasphemy. Tell him of one who is advanced to a Title of Honour, he lifts up his Hands and Eyes; describe a Publick Ceremony, he shakes his Head; show him a gay Equipage, he blesses himself. All the little Ornaments of Life are Pomps and Vanities. Mirth is wanton, and Wit prophane. He is scandalized at Youth for being lively, and at Childhood for being playful. He sits at a Christening, or a Marriage-Feast, as at a Funeral; sighs at the Conclusion of a merry Story; and grows devout when the rest of the Company grow pleasant. After all, *Sombrius* is a religious Man, and would have behaved himself very properly, had he lived when Christianity was under a general Persecution.

I would by no means presume to tax such Characters with Hypocrisie, as is done too frequently, that being a Vice which I think none but He, who knows the Secrets of Mens Hearts, should pretend to discover in another, where the Proofs of it do not amount to a Demonstration. On the contrary, as there are many Excellent Persons, who are weighed down by this habitual Sorrow of Heart, they rather deserve our Compassion than our Reproaches. I think, however, they would do well to consider, whether such a Behaviour does not deter Men from a Religious Life, by representing it as an unsociable State, that extinguishes all Joy and Gladness, darkens the Face of Nature, and destroys the Relish of Being it self.

I have, in former Papers, shown how great a Tendency there is to Chearfulness in Religion, and how such a Frame of Mind is not only the most lovely, but the most commendable in a virtuous Person. In short, those who represent Religion in so unamiable a Light, are like the Spies sent by *Moses* to make a Discovery of the Land of *Promise*, when by their Reports they discouraged the People from entering upon it. Those who show us the Joy, the Chearfulness, the good Humour, that naturally spring up in this happy State, are like the Spies bringing along with them the Clusters of Grapes, and delicious Fruits, that might invite their Companions into the pleasant Country which produced them.

An Eminent Pagan Writer has made a Discourse, to show that the Atheist, who denies a God, does him less Dishonour than the Man who owns his Being, but at the same time believes him to be cruel, hard to please, and terrible to Human Nature. For my own part, says he, I wou'd rather it should be said of me, that there was never any such Man as *Plutarch*, than that *Plutarch* was ill-natured, capricious or inhuman.

If we may believe our Logicians, Man is distinguished from all other Creatures, by the Faculty of Laughter. He has an Heart capable of Mirth, and naturally disposed to it. It is not the Business of Virtue to extirpate the Affections of the Mind, but to regulate them. It may moderate and restrain, but was not designed to banish Gladness from the Heart of Man. Religion contracts the Circle of our Pleasures, but leaves it wide enough for her Votaries to expatiate in. The Contemplation of the Divine Being, and the Exercise of Virtue, are in their own Nature so far from excluding all Gladness of Heart, that they are perpetual Sources of it. In a word, the true Spirit of Religion cheers, as well as composes, the Soul; it banishes indeed all Levity of Behaviour, all vicious and dissolute Mirth, but in exchange fills the Mind with a perpetual Serenity, uninterrupted Chearfulness, and an habitual Inclination to please others, as well as to be pleased in it self.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

At the Desire of several Ladies of Quality. By her Majesty's Company of Comedians.

AT the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane to Morrow being Saturday, the 27th of September, will be presented the last New Tragedy call'd, The Distrest Mother. By Her Majesty's Command no Persons are to be admitted behind the Scenes.

The Corpus Omnium Poetarum Latinorum, secundum Series Temporum, in two large Volumes Folio, being near finished, will be ready to be deliver'd by the twentieth of November next. Notice is now given that those that have Subscribed, or intend to do so, pay in their first Payment, and enter their Names, By the tenth of November ensuing, after which it will be 50 s. in Quires Small, and 3 Guineas Large Paper, it making about 50 Sheets more than proposed, besides the Largeness of the Index, &c. The Undertakers are Jacob Tonson at Shakespeare's Head in the Strand; John Nicholls at the Queens Arms in Little Britain; and Bern. Took at the Temple Gate; whose Subscriptions are taken in, and of most other Booksellers in Town and Country.

To be Lett, at Michaelmas Day next, a new well-built Brick House, at the top of the Hill at the farthest End of Islington over against Canbury House, newly Floored, Wainscotted and Sashed, stands backwards in the midst of Gardens, fronting Highgate and Hampstead, and hath all the Conveniences of the high Road without any Annoyance; late the Dwelling House of Mr. Charles Gilbert Deceased; the Houshold Goods, Fashionable and new, ready fixed, are to be Sold. The Sale will begin on Michaelmas Day next, and will continue till all be Sold; and may be seen at any time till the Day of Sale at the said House. Enquire also may be made of Mr. J. Prudom Mercer at the 7 Stars on Ludgate-Hill.

This Day is Publish'd,

The History of the Proceedings of the Second Session of this present Parliament. Wherein are the Debates at large in both Houses, about Peace and War, the Arguments about the Duke of Brandon's Case, the 12 new Peers, Mr. Walpole, the Duke of Marlborough, Mr. Cardonnel, and the Bishop of St. Asaph's Speech. As are also those relating to the Bills for preserving the Church of England, and tolerating the Episcopal Worship in Scotland, the Barrier Treaty, the Spanish Offers of France, the Grant Bill, the Cession of Arms, with the Protests at large, enter'd by Some Lords against the Duke of Ormond's Orders for not fighting, and rejecting the Guaranty Clause. To which is added the Number of Voices the most Important Resolutions were carry'd by. Printed for John Baker, at the Black Boy in Paper-noster-row, and sold by B. Berrington, at Essex-street end. Price 1 s 6 d. Where may be had the History of the First Session, Price 4 s.

LONDON: Printed for *Sam. Buckley*, at the *Dolphin* in *Little-Britain*; and Sold by *A. Baldwin* in *Warwick-lane*; where Advertisements are taken in, as also by *Charles Lillie*, Perfumer, at the Corner of *Beauford-Buildings* in the *Strand*.